

Today

MEA-MFT

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A publication for members of MEA-MFT



Sandi Currie/Lucky photos



Left: Rep. Assembly delegates Jamee Wilson, Jenny Warner, Bonnie Hoffman, Lance Edward, Jo Dell Beeler of Billings. Above: Inside the RA.

300+ members gather for MEA-MFT Rep. Assembly

From Libby to Wolf Point, East Glacier to Glasgow and all points in between, hundreds of MEA-MFT members from across Montana came to Helena for the annual MEA-MFT Representative Assembly (RA) April 5 and 6.

Locally elected by their fellow MEA-MFT members, RA delegates, more than 300 of them, reconnected with old friends, made new ones, and set the direction for their union.

With constant references to the ongoing attacks on unions and public employ-

ees nationwide, delegates rededicated themselves to fight for workers' rights, public education, public services, and Montana's middle class.

Delegates heard from elected officials, including Governor Steve Bullock and Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau. They heard an update on MEA-MFT's legislative agenda: "Pay Plan, Pensions, and Public Schools." They went to the state capitol to talk to legislators about the state pay plan,

protecting public employee pensions, and funding public education, preschool through grad school.

On the evening of April 5, delegates celebrated MEA-MFT's Members of the Year, Alex Schaeffer, Marilyn Besich, & Michael Hoffman.

Delegates also elected state officers, passed a budget, amendments to the MEA-MFT constitution, dues, and new business items. Read more about RA 2013 on page 6. ■

Meet MEA-MFT's Members of the Year!



Read about Alex Schaeffer, Marilyn Besich, & Michael Hoffman on page 4.



Legislative wrap-up:

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Done...just begun

BY ERIC FEAVER
MEA-MFT PRESIDENT



‘So, given these objectives, how well did we do? Darned well... but we are not done yet.’

When the 2013 Legislature came to town, we had a handful of core value objectives.

Proactively, we sought to:

- Secure a 5% increase each year of the coming biennium in state employee base pay,
- Amortize and save public employee retirement pensions,
- Increase state funding of k-higher education, and
- Bond-to-build capital construction in the Montana University System and Historical Society.

Reactively, we were determined to defend:

- Public and private sector workers’ right to organize and bargain collectively from anti-union hostiles,
- Public schools from libertarian, sectarian, and profit-taking efforts to privatize and fracture if not destroy our social compact, and
- Voter rights from politicians still unhappy about the last election.

So, given these objectives, how well did we do?

Darned well...but we are not done yet.

Proactive: The legislature cut millions out of the appropriation intended to fund 5/5 for the coming biennium starting July 1. And it inserted squirrely language in the authorizing bill, HB 13, urging the governor and presumably us to take the available dollars and correct salary inequities the 2011 Legislature created when it refused to pass a pay plan. Hmmm.

Interesting how some legislators yammer hard about how they are not at the bargaining table with us...but they never propose legislation to make that happen. Instead they direct the governor to do it...and then they decide to do what they want with legal impunity.

Whatever, with dollars appropriated in HB 13 and other funding bills, we can bargain 5 and 5 with the governor one way or another and then bargain additional dollars with state agencies to address ugly salary inequities.

We amortized and saved the Teachers Retirement and Public Employee Retirement Systems. But in the process we took an unavoidable hit. Legislators we needed to build a majority to secure our pensions were determined to truncate

and delay if not eliminate guaranteed annual benefit adjustments. So, we did what we had to do to pass our retirement bills—HBs 377 and 454. Soon we will litigate to recover our GABA losses. We stand on solid legal ground here, but like all court appeals, they don’t happen in a nanosecond and nothing is ever 100% certain.

SB 175 not only funded k-12 better than any bill ever has, it united the Montana public education community as never before. And it may have been the catalyst to confront and defeat the Tea Party gang in the legislature. But 175 has issues the governor and education community must address over the biennium.

As for state funding of the Montana University System, we have so much work to do.

For the second session in a row, legislators chose not to bond to build and create jobs. But the legislature did agree to pay cash for certain university system construction projects. Not as broadly as we had hoped...and once again, legislators eliminated new building at the Montana Historical Society.

Reactive: Throughout the 2012 election season, we heard plenty of anti-union Tea Party rhetoric. But the election of Governor Steve Bullock over a Scott Walker wannabe chilled the palaver. We saw only one bill introduced to harm unions, and it passed away without a whimper.

Unfortunately, the dark-money-funded anti-public school gang, primarily represented by the Montana Family Foundation, was hard at work. We suffered seven public school privatization bills: three pay voucher bills, two charter school bills, and two tax credit bills — all peas from the same pod. Each mandated taxpayers pay for the privatization of our neighborhood, state and locally funded and governed public schools.

Working with Republican and Democratic legislators and our partners in the entire public education community, we killed six of these bills. Unfortunately, last-minute deal making passed the one remaining tax credit bill — SB 81 — onto the governor for his veto. Thank you, Governor Bullock.

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Leadership & staff changes at MEA-MFT

MEA-MFT Representative Assembly delegates elected a new vice president in April: **Tammy Pilcher**.

Pilcher has worked in the Helena School District for 21 years, 17 years teaching grades k-5 and four years as president of the Helena Education Association.



Tammy Pilcher

"I look forward to serving our 18,000-plus members as vice president," Pilcher said. "So much of what I've done as an MEA-MFT board member has been advocating for all our members: state and county employees, higher education, Head Start, and health care employees as well as k-12 members."

Pilcher is married with three children, ages 18, 15, and 13. The vote for vice president originally showed Gary Stein of Missoula as the winner, but a recount revealed a vote-counting error. A second recount confirmed Pilcher as the winner.

"This is the first time in MEA-MFT history we've had an election error," said MEA-MFT Executive Director Erik Burke. "We will be carefully reviewing election procedures going forward to make sure it's the last time."

Pilcher was also elected president of the Montana State AFL-CIO at AFL-CIO's May convention.

STAFF CHANGES: We have had several staff changes in our Billings field office recently.

Field consultant **Melissa Case** has accepted a job as Pacific Region Director for the National Education Association. Case worked at MEA-MFT since 2002, originally serving as director of organizing. She was hired as a field consultant in the Billings office this past fall.

Case will continue to work from Billings, serving NEA affiliates in Montana, Idaho, Nevada, California, Washington, Oregon, Alaska and Hawaii. "We're excited that Melissa is staying in the NEA family and that she'll be working with us in Montana for years to come," said Burke. "We're grateful for her years of service to MEA-MFT. Melissa was involved in several successful organizing drives that enlarged our footprint in Montana, particularly with higher education."

Jeff Greenfield has been hired to fill Case's position. Greenfield hails from Billings and Shepherd, where he taught earth science, honors chemistry and physics, and coached track and football.

Greenfield was elected secretary-treasurer of MEA-MFT in 2005, president of Billings Education Association in 2007, and vice president of MEA-MFT in 2011. As a field consultant, he will serve 27 MEA-MFT locals in a wide expanse stretching from Miles City to Broadus, Roundup to Pryor. He will work with k-12 locals along with the Montana Women's Prison, Pine Hills, and Miles Community College.

Scott C. McCulloch has stepped up to fill Greenfield's term as full-time release BEA president. McCulloch, a history teacher at Billings Senior High, says working in an office after 34 years in the classroom is "a little odd, but I'll get over it." The BEA/MEA-MFT office now has two Scott McCullochs. Scott T. McCulloch, MEA-MFT field consultant, and Scott C. are longtime friends and are used to people mixing them up. ■

Welcome, Montana City ESPs!

Welcome to MEA-MFT's newest local affiliate, the Montana City Classified Employees Association. The union includes education support professionals at Montana City School, who voted in February to form a union and affiliate with MEA-MFT. We're happy to have them in the family. ■

Done...just begun (from p. 2)

Finally and unfortunately, the governor cannot veto legislative referenda. Consequently, majority Republican Party legislators concluded that voters in the November 2014 general election will decide if eligible citizens thereafter should be able to register and vote on Election Day...and if primary elections should be won by the top two vote recipients regardless of party affiliation. We will hear a lot about these two referenda as time marches on. We oppose them both.

Thanks: Special thanks to all: members, leaders, staff, partners across the political, education, and union spectrum who value the folks who do the work that matters and the work they do. ■



Melissa Case, outgoing field consultant (but not going far), at our 2011 rally.



Jeff Greenfield, incoming field consultant, outgoing MEA-MFT vice president.



Scott C. McCulloch, new Billings Education Assoc. president

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Members 2013 of the Year

MEA-MFT annually honors three members of the year — members who are outstanding in their profession as well as their union work. (The k-12 teacher of the year is honored at a separate event as part of the Montana Teacher of the Year program.)

MEA-MFT Representative Assembly delegates celebrated the 2013 members of the year at a gala event in Helena April 5. Congratulations to these inspirational, dedicated members!

Alex Schaeffer: Education Support Professional of the Year



Alex Schaeffer's first memory of school was missing the bus. He panicked. "My younger brother stood up and told me it's OK," he recalled. Now, as a tutor for the Kalispell Public Schools, Schaeffer said, "I look for the Alex that was me and tell him it's OK."

"Alex is in it for the children," said Mike Thiel, as he introduced Schaeffer at the Members of the Year celebration. Thiel, president of the Kalispell Education Association, said he first met Schaeffer 10 years ago, when Schaeffer was "talking truth to power."

A native of Whitefish, Schaeffer has been tutoring readers since he was in college. Today, he helps struggling readers in grades k-5, working with 62 students each

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Michael Hoffman: Public Employee Member of the Year



"Michael Hoffman is the quiet kind of leader who shows up every day and gets things done," said MEA-MFT Secretary-Treasurer Rich Aarstad, introducing Hoffman at the Members of the Year celebration.

Take the November 2012 election for example: Every Tuesday evening before the election, Hoffman showed up at the MEA-MFT office in Helena right after finishing work at the Jefferson County Planning Department.

Week after week, he helped with the MEA-MFT phone bank, making hundreds of calls to fellow members, asking them to support Denise Juneau and Steve Bullock.

"Michael gets what our union is about," Aarstad said. "It's about all of us, all the parts."

On the job training: Hoffman grew up in Helena. He served in the Air Force for four years, then worked for the Helena Housing Authority (HHA), doing maintenance work on low-income housing. "That's when I came to learn about the needs of those folks and how hard they struggled," he said.

During his years at HHA, Hoffman also worked evenings and weekends for a survey firm to supplement his income and support his young family. It turned out to be good training for his next career move: When the assistant planner job opened up at Jefferson County, Hoffman decided to apply for it. "Jump into the swimming pool and start swimming," he laughed. "I like public service."

As assistant planner, Hoffman works on land use issues including subdivisions

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Marilyn Besich: Faculty Member of the Year

"If Marilyn Besich is in a room and you don't know she's there, you might not be in the same room," said MEA-MFT Field Consultant Tom Burgess as he introduced Besich at the Members of the Year celebration.

With her background in businesses both small and large, Burgess said, "Marilyn could have easily gone down the corporate road."

Instead, Besich chose to teach at the Great Falls College (formerly the College of Technology), where she serves as



program director for the Business Administration Department, teaching management and entrepreneurship.

For 22 years, she has given Montanans the skills to launch their own careers in business. Students often come back after graduating and tell her how valuable their training was.

Besich's work boosts Montana's economy as well as her students' futures. "Even in bad economic times, business needs good managers and smart workers," she said. She sees this as "a time in our economy when we need entrepreneurship more than ever."

Besich has also worked with a creative arts program, helping artists learn how to market their art. "It's rewarding to help people in other fields get into running a business," she said.

"I like stretching out of my business world and into the arts, where artists are discovering how to make a living from their talents and creative gifts."

Union roots: Besich was born and raised in Butte. Her parents, also Butte natives, were staunch union supporters. Other family members worked for the

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People & voices at Representative Assembly



▲Erin Gammon, student delegate, MSU-Bozeman.

Eric Feaver, MEA-MFT President: “This is our first RA since Jim McGarvey passed away. I’m convinced he’s with us.”

Shannon Bender, Great Falls (to a standing ovation): “Our Head Start teachers make \$18,000 a year. I’ve supported 5 and 5 for state employees. Please support us.”

State employee members show their support for the state pay plan, HB 13. ▼



Governor Steve Bullock: “My name is Steve, and I’m a state employee. I consider you friends. I could be in any community (during the campaign) and know that you were calling each other and talking about how important this election was. Thanks for everything you did. We won by 6,500 votes. 6,500 votes would have made this a ‘right-to-work’ state, with charter schools. Because of your efforts, we’ll still be in a state we can be proud of.”



David Chalmers, science teacher at Heart Butte on the Blackfeet Reservation: “I met Eric Feaver, John Stocks (executive director of NEA), and Denise Juneau in Heart Butte last year. I was a new teacher. I had no test tubes, no beakers.



Next thing I knew, I received a \$5,000 grant from the NEA Foundation and a \$500 grant from MEA-MFT. I now have my test tubes, beakers, and graduated cylinders. I want you to know I would do anything for MEA-MFT, anything for NEA, and anything for Denise Juneau.” (John Stocks arranged for NEA to get Chalmers the

grant. The \$500 grant came from MEA-MFT’s Montana Professional Teaching Foundation Karen Cox Memorial Grants. (More about these grants on pages 16-17.)



▲Mike Thiel of Kalispell wears his heart on his sleeve — and his back.

Patty Myers, Great Falls member and chair of the Board of Public Education: “Charter schools are currently allowed in Montana, folks. But they have to come under local school board and Board of Public Education control. I challenge anyone who wants to open a charter school, go ahead and do it. But do it under the auspices of local school board and the Board of Public Education.”



▲Higher education delegates.

Lori Chovanak, executive director, Montana Nurses Association: “We are definitely stronger together. We are so thrilled to be brothers and sisters with you.” (MEA-MFT shares registered nurse members k-12 through higher education with the MNA.)

Denise Juneau, Superintendent of Public Instruction: “I continue to be in awe of what you do. All of you — state, county, municipal employees, Head Start staff, higher education faculty, k-12 teachers and support staff — you all help our communities and our state be the great place it is.



“I am proud to be a member of MEA-MFT. Our values include taking care of our neighbors so they have heat in their homes, food on their tables, health care when they are sick, a free quality

public education, access and opportunity to attend college, the ability to find a good-paying job, and once they get a job, the ability to join a union if they want to. Those are Montana values, middle class values, and we should be proud of the values we fight for.”



◀Amanda Curtis, MEA-MFT member and Butte legislator, gives a report from the state capitol.

Delegates listen to Membership Man, armed with “membership seeds,” a.k.a. M&Ms. ▼



◀Dan Kelly of Deer Lodge, long-time MEA-MFT board member and 36-year teacher, receives a standing ovation on the eve of his retirement from the board. “I worked for my union. That’s what I want for my obituary,” he said. Others retiring from the board are Ron Kimmet of Hardin, Patty Muir of Laurel, Diane Elliott of Poplar, and Charlie Martin and Mike Kujawa of Butte. Our thanks to them all.

‘What do you think of your first RA?’

MEA-MFT had a record number of first-time delegates at this year’s RA. Here’s what three of them said about their experience:

Christine Montano, Bozeman High School English teacher: “This is incredible. Amazing. I would like to come every year. I’m a third generation union member. My father was a teacher, my grandparents worked in the Chicago stockyards. A free, quality public education and public services are essential for the middle class. It’s frightening to think what might happen to the middle class without those values.”



Christine Montano

“If workers are not represented by MEA-MFT, politicians would turn the keys to the state over to corporations, including charter schools and private prisons.”

“I’m having fun. It’s so much fun to peek our heads out of the classroom from time to time. If we just hunker down in our classrooms, our rights would be eroded. We’re fighting desperately for our rights. We’re painted to look like we’re in these cushy jobs and just want more, but really we just want the best for our students, our patients, our clients. I see this as solidarity for the middle class.”



Candice O'Brien

Candice O'Brien, Local 4700 member (Montana State Prison): “I found it all very exciting. I’m new to the union. This helps me understand what my union does for me and what I’ll be doing for my members as a steward. I work in classification and placement. I decide if inmates are high, medium, or low security. I see that my co-workers need more rights, more pay, more protection.”



Cherie Bilodeau

Cherie Bilodeau, Local 4700 member (Montana State Prison): “I thought it was a very moving experience — the support, the family environment. We’re all in the same boat. We’re all here for each other, not just for ourselves.” (Cherie works in the prison infirmary and will soon change jobs, supervising prisoners in the laundry.)



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‘My dad taught me to ask, “Who am I? Am I enough?” Life is short, and there’s no greater time than today to stand up.’

Alex Schaeffer

‘I was a couch potato myself for many years (when it came to activism). Times have changed. The fight continues.’

Michael Hoffman

Alex Schaeffer (from p. 4)

day. “Being able to share the joy of reading and poetry and books — it’s the greatest job there is,” he said. “Many of these younger children have never seen a book before. Reading takes them to a new world.”

Learning to read can make or break a child’s success in school, Schaeffer explained. “Reading is how children judge themselves — those who can or can’t. Somebody needs to be there to remind them that we all learn at different rates. Struggling readers just need to know it’s going to be OK. That’s why I can’t wait to get back into the office every day.”

Foreign word: When the Kalispell tutors debated forming a union in 1996, “I was the deciding vote,” Schaeffer said. “I did not know anything about a union. It was a foreign word to me. But I knew people were really hot about it.”

During those discussions, he said, “a man walked into the room with such integrity. That man was Jim McGarvey (former president of the Montana Federation of Teachers and vice president of MEA-MFT). You knew he was a man who spoke from the heart, who spoke truth. He dragged me into the union.”

The collectively bargained contract that resulted is what has kept the tutors around, he said. “It still connects students to tutors today — that thin, thin contract that makes the promise that we’ll keep going.”

Ever since that union vote, Schaeffer has been a union activist on all levels, local, state, and national. He is currently president of the Kalispell Tutors Association.

He has been a powerful voice for his fellow Education Support Professionals. When MEA-MFT launched the PASS program in 2003 to help ESPs meet the stringent standards of the No Child Left Behind Law, Schaeffer was recruited as a PASS trainer, a service he continues to provide.

“Montana is the only state that took a harsh law and provided professional training to everyone who was going to lose their job under the law, and it was MEA-MFT that did it,” Schaeffer said. “Five hundred people have now been through that training.”

Schaeffer told the crowd at the celebration that his father taught him that “our circumstance may not be perfect, but our intention ought to be. He

taught me to ask, ‘Who am I? Am I enough?’ If you’re going to stand for something, you’d better know why. Life is short, and there’s no greater time than today to stand up.” ■

Michael Hoffman (from p. 4)

and commercial and industrial development. “It’s about the way the county grows in the future, making sure the public has input,” he said.

“It can be controversial. We work with both opponents and proponents of growth. Both sides are very passionate. They don’t always see eye to eye. I help them try to come to consensus.”

Wide open, full-throttle: To Hoffman, being an MEA-MFT member means “being part of a larger family of professionals who have decades of combined knowledge and experience. It’s a network of people you can tap into to help with problems.” He serves as vice president of his local, the Federation of Jefferson County Public Employees.

MEA-MFT’s advocacy for public employees “is critical, especially now,” he said. “Having seen first-hand the advocacy, hard work, and professional pride MEA-MFT staff and leaders take in their work — it’s an eye-opener.”

Noting the recent attacks on unions nationwide, Hoffman said, “I could really relate to what happened in Wisconsin. I knew we needed to stand up and fight. We’re seeing some folks trying to tear us apart. Never before have we seen such attacks on our retirement, our salaries. It’s wide open, full-throttle attacks on public institutions. It’s all about privatizing public institutions for profit.”

Hoffman saw the dangers of privatization while working at the Helena Housing Authority. “Any time we had to contract something out, you almost had to double the cost,” he said. “You usually didn’t get the quality of work with a private contractor, and the cost to taxpayer was almost a third again higher.”

Those issues, combined with Steve Bullock’s fight against dark money, Denise Juneau’s fight on No Child Left Behind, and Linda McCulloch’s fight to preserve Election Day voter registration are what prompted him to devote so much time and energy to help elect those candidates, he said. “I told people on the phones, ‘I’m conservative.

But look at what the opposition has to offer.”

Hoffman told the crowd at the celebration, “I couldn’t be more proud than to be part of the union. I strongly encourage each member here tonight to get involved and stay involved. I was a couch potato myself for many years. Times have changed. The fight continues. We have a long way to go.” ■

Marilyn Besich (from p. 4)

copper company. “All my life I’ve sort of been under that (union) umbrella,” she said.

Her father, who was born in 1899, lived in Butte when unions were “growing and developing and struggling,” Besich said. The stories he told her of fires in the mines and other struggles of working people shaped her world view for life.

Besich was in grade school when workers at the Anaconda Company went on a nine-month strike in the 1960s. “I remember my mom packing two lunches, one for me and one for some

other kid whose dad was on strike,” she said.

“I grew up on the spirit of collaboration, cooperation, and unity. Those values stay with you.”

Along her career path, Besich earned multiple degrees in business and education (two bachelor’s, a master’s, and a doctoral degree); had her own family; and worked for Wendt Advertising in Great Falls and other companies.

She began teaching at the Great Falls College of Technology in 1992. Since 1994, she has been a leader in her MEA-MFT local, the Vocational Technical Educators of Montana (VTEM), a union that spans three campuses statewide.

As the current president of VTEM, she also serves on MEA-MFT’s Coalition of Union Faculty (CUF).

“It’s very inspiring to me to see the group (CUF) really start to flourish,” she said. “It has really started to pick up some momentum. Higher education members of MEA-MFT are more unified now than ever.” ■

‘I remember my mom packing two lunches, one for me and one for some other kid whose dad was on strike. Those values stay with you.’

Marilyn Besich



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Legislative wrap-up: against all odds



For MEA-MFT, the 2013 Legislature was all about:

- Pensions
- Pay Plan
- Public Education

The 2013 Montana Legislature is behind us. The dust has mostly settled after a long, intense, high-stakes, high-speed session.

Against all odds, and with huge help from our members and allies, MEA-MFT managed to accomplish most of the items on our to-do list.

We also played one heck of a defensive game, stopping numerous bills to gut public employee pensions, privatize our public schools, and close the Montana Developmental Center in Boulder.

In the process, we built stronger relationships than ever before with others in the state who care about public education and public services — including several Republican legislators who stood up to dark money by breaking ranks with their leadership.

In all, it's a story of remarkable teamwork.

Our agenda: MEA-MFT went into the 2013 Montana Legislature with a stripped-down agenda: • Pensions • Pay plan • Public education.

Here's the outcome:

Protecting public employee **PENSIONS**

This session was do-or-die time for saving Montana's public employee pension systems and making them actuarially sound.

Working with Governor Steve Bullock and other allies, we did it. There are kinks to be worked out, but the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) and Teachers Retirement System (TRS) are now off the endangered species list.

Background: Due mostly to the market crash of 2008-09, Montana's public employee pension systems needed a financial shot in the arm to get them back on sound actuarial footing.

Because past legislatures had kicked the pension can down the road, it was all the more crucial to pass a fix this session.

MEA-MFT helped build a new coalition called Montana's Promise that included the Council of Professional Firefighters, AFSCME, AFL-CIO, SEIU, and MEA-MFT. Together, we worked closely with Governor Bullock's office to develop bills to amortize and protect public employee pensions.

We faced an opposing team of majority party legislators who wanted to gut Montana's existing pension systems. Foremost among them was Senator Dave Lewis (R-Helena). "Senator Lewis had a personal mission to unravel the pension systems that have worked well for decades," said Diane Fladmo, MEA-MFT's research director

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January 21 State Pay Plan Day of Action

Clockwise from right: 1) Helena College members Steve Lewis, Bryon Steinwand, and Rick Henry in the state capitol after talking to legislators about HB 13, the state pay plan. 2) MEA-MFT member Theresa Becker got up at 4:30 in the morning to make the 215-mile trip from Thompson Falls to Helena for the Day of Action. 3) Denelle Chartier & Shannon Merchen of Billings in the state capitol. 4) State & higher education employees walk from Jefferson School to the state capitol to ask legislators to support the pay plan.



February 18 State Pay Plan Day of Action



Clockwise from top left: 1) State employees and families gather for MEA-MFT's second Day of Action in support of HB 13. 2) Members listen to speakers in front of the capitol. 3) MEA-MFT Secretary-Treasurer Rich Aarstad talks about the pay plan, flanked by Mike Touchette and Christin Thennis. 4) Rep. Tom Woods (D-Bozeman), one of our legislative heroes and an MEA-MFT member, enjoys his "5/5" cookie while sporting the "5/5" button.

March 18 Public Education Day of Advocacy

This legislative session found MEA-MFT and other public school advocates working together as never before on behalf of Montana's children and their education.

The unity was highly visible throughout the state capitol building March 18, when dozens of MEA-MFT members joined k-12 school administrators, trustees, school business officials, and others for a Day of Advocacy. The event was jointly

sponsored by MEA-MFT, Montana Assoc. of School Business Officials, Montana Rural Education Assoc., Montana School Boards Assoc., School Administrators of Montana, and Montana Quality Education Coalition.

The event brought public school advocates from around the state together in support of the session's key school funding bill, SB 175, and against bills to privatize schools.



Kalispell members & teachers Mike Thiel, Christy Peeples, Libby Boar, and Anthony Lapke outside the MEA-MFT office, bound for the capitol across the street during the Day of Advocacy.



Bozeman members & teachers Eric Matthews, Anne Keith, and Jerry Reisig take a breather at the state capitol during the Day of Advocacy.

Legislative wrap-up: against all odds

Post-session message to Eric Feaver:

"There are no words to express my gratitude to you and your office for continually making your presence known at the capitol, your influence on important legislation, and your all-around positive attitude toward the children we teach.

"A heartfelt thank you to you and your staff. I am proud to be a member of this team. The best part of this union is that even though we are considered a 'labor union,' **our fight goes so much further.** The issues that are defended are always in the best interest of our students, our young children just getting started, and other entities that contribute to the betterment of humanity.

"I am in awe of how hard you all work."
Shelly Bailey, President, Havre Education Assoc.

(Continued from p. 10)

and lead lobbyist on pension bills.

Lewis and others were hell-bent on dumping Montana's existing defined benefit (DB) pension plans and switching to defined contribution (DC) plans.

As explained in the last *MEA-MFT Today*, DB plans guarantee public employees and educators a fixed monthly amount after they retire. DC plans, on the other hand, are like 401 (k) plans: They are driven by the market, making them highly volatile.

Switching to DC plans would cost Montana taxpayers millions more and leave retirees without the security provided by the existing DB plans. (It's no small irony that Sen. Lewis himself is a retired Montana state employee who enjoys his own DB pension.)

Bottom line: Pensions saved. Though the deck was stacked mightily against us given the make-up of the legislature, MEA-MFT and our allies got the governor's pension bills to the goal line:

HB 377 (Woods, D-Bozeman) addresses the actuarial soundness of TRS.

HB 454 (McChesney, D-Miles City) addresses the actuarial soundness of PERS.

Both bills retain the existing defined benefit (DB) pension systems for PERS and TRS.

The two bills ask both employees and their employers (local and state government) to pay a little more into the pensions — 2% for employers and 1% for employees — at least until the pension funds are on sounder financial footing.

The legislature's Special Joint Committee on Pensions (chaired by Sen. Lewis) saddled both bills with amendments that reduce guaranteed annual benefit adjustments (GABA) for future and current retirees. All efforts to remove those amendments failed on party-line votes.

"Some folks thought we should oppose the bills because of the GABA amendments, but these bills absolutely had to pass," Feaver said. "Without HB 377 and HB 454, there would be no vehicle to protect pensions for current and future retirees enrolled in PERS and TRS."

Late-session technical amendments make HB 454 work less than perfectly, but these issues can be fixed legislatively down the road.

Without these bills, the unfunded liabilities in PERS and TRS would only continue to grow, becoming ever more difficult, if not impossible, to fix in the next legislature or the one after.

What next: MEA-MFT is working right now with other groups and individuals on possible litigation on GABA.

Meantime, we have reason to celebrate. "With PERS and TRS protected, people who work in state and county government and public schools will have a source of income when they retire until the day they die. So will their beneficiaries," Feaver said. "It's not the risky venture into the marketplace world that a defined contribution (DC) plan presents. For that, we declare victory."

A lot of help from our friends: Many people helped with this amazing pension victory: Our thanks to Governor Steve Bullock and his staff, who stayed the course for public and school employees; our Montana's Promise partners; staff from PERS and TRS, who spent countless hours explaining an extremely complex topic to legislators and others; the two bill sponsors, Rep. Tom Woods (D-Bozeman) and Rep. Bill McChesney (D-Miles City), who both did a heroic job of presenting the bills on the floor and in committees; and the Republican legislators who broke ranks with their leadership to vote with us.

Bad pension bills killed: MEA-MFT and our allies stopped several bills intended to cripple PERS and TRS by turning them into DC systems.

We killed HB 338 (Regier, R-Kalispell), a bill to end all public employee pensions and force all new public employees (state, county, city, and school) into one huge, volatile, DC plan. HB 338 would have suspended GABA for all current and future retirees. For this, every current and future public employee would have paid more.

We also stopped SB 406 (Dee Brown, R-Hungry Horse), a legislative referendum to turn TRS and PERS into defined contribution plans.

Higher education retirement: MEA-MFT's bill to provide another 1% increase in the state's contribution to faculty "Optional" Retirement Plan (ORP) retirement accounts died on a party line vote. A sad loss. We'll keep trying.

PAY PLAN: Ending the freeze

House Bill 13, the state pay plan, had a tough uphill battle, as we knew it would.

Background: HB 13 started out with the provisions that MEA-MFT and our fellow public employee unions, MPEA and AFSCME, negotiated with the governor's office last year.

It contained a 5% increase in base pay and

10% increase in health insurance each of the next two years for all state employees. It ended the four-year freeze in base pay that state employees have suffered.

MEA-MFT leaders, staff, members, and our fellow unions worked tirelessly to pass HB 13. Along with MPEA and AFSCME, we organized two Days of Action, bringing hundreds of members to the capitol to talk to legislators. We mobilized members to call and e-mail legislators. We had Governor Steve Bullock on our side throughout the session.

For a while, it looked like majority party legislators would stage a repeat of the 2011 session by holding HB 13 hostage until the end of the session and then killing it.

MEA-MFT members, led by Secretary-Treasurer Rich Aarstad, weren't having it. For weeks, they mobilized fellow state employees from all three unions to spend their lunch hour lining the halls of the capitol with signs urging the House Appropriations Committee to "Free HB 13."

HB 13 finally emerged from the committee with amendments cutting \$38 million from the bill and adding the unprecedented recommendation that state employee unions negotiate the remainder with the governor.

Attempts to restore the \$38 million failed on straight party line votes.

As legislative leadership continued to delay action on HB 13, state employees continued to stand in the capitol halls week after week politely asking legislators to "Free Bill" (see p. 15).

Bottom line: Freeze ended. HB 13 finally passed the legislature. It does not include the specific, 5% across-the-board raises in base pay over the next two years that we negotiated.

Instead, the bill appropriates a lump sum of \$113.7 million over the next two years for the executive branch to distribute in raises. It still includes the 10% increases in employer contributions to health insurance.

What next: Now that Governor Bullock has signed HB 13, MEA-MFT and our partners, MPEA and AFSCME, will sit down with the governor's representatives and bargain a pay plan for the 2015 biennium — the best deal we can get for all state employees. "It is our position right now that every state employee gets 5 & 5," said Feaver. "There is enough money in HB 13 to accomplish that by delaying the starting date

of the increase. Then we go to agency bargaining where we have other dollars available in HB 2 and SB 410 to fix, we hope, pay inequities so far as possible."

The legislature also passed SJ 17 to study the broad band pay system. MEA-MFT will be involved in this study.

Funding & protecting PUBLIC EDUCATION

Head Start: Our bill to provide state funding for Head Start, HB 353 (McClafferty, D-Butte), did not survive. This is a sad loss; but we will try again next session. Sometimes it takes a while for a good idea to take hold.

University system: Overall, public higher education funding ended up in relatively good shape in the state budgeting process.

The big victory for higher education was passing a bill for new construction across the Montana University System.

Funding that most directly affects MEA-MFT faculty members' salaries is contained in HB 13,

Post-session message to Eric Feaver:

"You did well. And against some awful odds. Thank you for your daily updates on the care and feeding of our troublesome legislature. I received better, quicker, and more honest legislative news through you and your group than anywhere else in the news media. ...

"I have been an avowed unionist my whole life. ... I depend on folks such as yourselves to ensure a **decent world for my kids and grandkids** to live in."

Danny Lee, Missoula, former union electrician, former AFL-CIO board member



Your MEA-MFT lobby team: Back from left: J.C. Weingartner, Erik Burke. Middle: Diane Fladmo, Marco Ferro. Front: Chris Cavazos, Eric Feaver, Terry Mlnow.

the state pay plan. The amount appropriated for faculty in HB 13—\$23 million—is "short of what it should be," said Marco Ferro, MEA-MFT's lead lobbyist on higher education issues. "We have work to do in this area."

Our bill to earmark lottery revenue for higher education scholarships (HB 166), which would
(Continued on p. 14)

Legislative wrap-up: against all odds

Post-session messages to Eric Feaver:

"Thank you for all the hard work you and your crew did for us, especially scoping out the nuances, connotations, and gray areas in the meanings and relationships among the 'players.' **It is quite the chess game! And OUR lives are at stake!**"

Pam Stuckey, State Employee, Great Falls

"As a retired MEA-MFT member, I appreciate all MEA-MFT has done for me in the past as an educator and the hard battle you have to fight every session for teacher and retiree rights. I hate to think what education in Montana would be without MEA-MFT."

Shirley Thomas, Helena

(Continued from p. 13)

help make higher education more affordable for Montana families and free up money for faculty salaries, was tabled in the House Education Committee.

K-12 schools: MEA-MFT helped build a powerful new coalition this session to fight for Montana's k-12 public schools.

We teamed up with the Montana School Boards Assoc., School Administrators of Montana, Montana Rural Education Assoc., Montana Quality Education Coalition, Office of Public Instruction, Montana Assoc. of School Business Clerks, Board of Public Education, and Small Schools Alliance.

This group met weekly throughout the session in the MEA-MFT office to discuss issues and build a common message. We mobilized our various memberships to push Senate Bill 175 (L. Jones, R-Conrad) through the legislature. Passage of SB 175 represents the largest increase in ongoing school funding ever. It's a major boost for Montana's cash-strapped schools.

SB 175 also provides permanent property tax relief and helps schools deal with the impacts of oil and gas development.

The bill takes half of the state's current share of oil and gas revenues and directs it to provide better funding for k-12 schools and permanent reductions in property taxes statewide.

"This bill had strong bipartisan support, and passing it is a huge victory," Feaver said.

Fighting attacks on public schools: MEA-MFT and our public school allies killed a slew of bills designed to divert millions of tax dollars from public schools to private, for-profit, and religious schools.

Backers of such bills call them "school choice" bills — a nice-sounding term designed to hide the true purpose of the measures.

All of these bills were frontal assaults on the core of our democracy, our public schools. They violated the Montana State Constitution. They diverted tax money to schools that had no accountability to taxpayers.

"These are not made-in-Montana ideas," said Marco Ferro, MEA-MFT's public policy director and lead lobbyist on school funding bills. "Most of these bills came straight from the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), the right-wing corporate group that creates boiler-plate

bills and feeds them to state legislators across the nation."

ALEC is one of the groups funded by Charles and David Koch, the ultra-right wing, billionaire oil tycoons based in Kansas. Others who pushed so-called school "choice" this session were Bozeman transplant and software mogul Greg Gianforte, the Montana Family Foundation, and Koch-funded groups: the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, Institute for Justice, and Friedman Foundation.

These groups caused a record number of seven privatization bills to be introduced this session. MEA-MFT and the public education community killed them all except one, SB 81, which Governor Bullock vetoed.

We killed three **school voucher bills:** HB 288, HB 357, and HB 390 permitted a parent to shop around either for special education (HBs 288 and 390), or for regular education (HB 357). Parents could choose just about any provider they want — public or private, religious or not. All three bills exempted providers from any state regulatory authority.

We killed two **charter school bills:** SB 374 (Lewis, R-Helena) diverted taxpayer money from public schools to so-called "public" charter schools that would be "public" in name only. The bill sold public schools to the highest bidder, a bidder that might be an international corporation based in New Jersey or Singapore.

SB 374 booted collective bargaining and union contracts out the door. Teachers and school support staff would have no protection in the workplace. Nor could they participate in the Teachers Retirement System.

SB 374 was the resurrected version of HB 315 (Knudsen, R-Culbertson), a charter school bill we killed in the House on third reading.

We killed one **tuition tax credit bill:** HB 213 (Fitzpatrick, R-Great Falls) permitted a taxpayer to claim up to \$550 in a tax credit per scholarship to any private school, religious or not.

SB 81 (Lewis, R-Helena) is the only privatization bill that passed. Governor Bullock ultimately vetoed it. The bill created taxpayer-funded public and private scholarship organizations that would receive tax credit dollars and redistribute those dollars through student scholarships. The scholarships could be for public, private, religious, and secular schools. MEA-MFT and other education

groups requested the governor's veto.

Backers of school privatization tend to be either corporate interests that see money to be made buying and selling our public schools, religious institutions determined to take taxpayer dollars to educate in their own faith-based way, or libertarians who hate anything "government."

They aren't going away. We'll be fighting this battle for a long time.

More DEFENSE

Privatization: MEA-MFT stopped repeated efforts to close the Montana Developmental Center in Boulder, a move that would leave many MDC residents with nowhere to go. Senate Bill 254 (Caferro, D-Helena) purported to let residents live in the least restrictive environment. "For most of these residents, MDC is the least restrictive environment," said Terry Minow, MEA-MFT political director and lobbyist, who took the lead on SB 254.

MEA-MFT mobilized members and others to speak out for MDC residents, their caregivers (some of whom are MEA-MFT members), and other Montana citizens by opposing SB 254.

Workers' rights: Working with the Montana State AFL-CIO, we easily buried in committee the only anti-worker bill introduced this session. The fact that we didn't see any other so-called "right-to-work," paycheck deception, or other anti-union attacks is a testimony to our strong presence with our AFL-CIO brothers and sisters.

Voters' rights: We helped stop several bills that would have made it harder for eligible Montanans to vote. The legislative majority did, however, pass two bad referenda attacking voters' rights in order to avoid the governor's veto pen. Much more on these later.

THANK YOU for your help!

Our heartfelt thanks to the hundreds of MEA-MFT members around the state who helped during the session. Thanks to those who came to Helena to testify on bills. Thanks to those who e-mailed and called legislators when we asked. Thanks to those who came to our State Pay Plan Days of Action and public schools Day of Advocacy. Thanks to those who lined the halls of the capitol holding "Free HB 13" signs.

Your support made all the difference. ■

Post-session messages to Eric Feaver:

"Congratulations and thank you for the continuous e-mails and **constant vigilance** for all educators!! I appreciate everyone's hard work!!"

Erica Zins, School Counselor, Russell Elementary, Missoula

"This is exactly why we have a union. You and staff did an excellent job."
Mike Picking, President, Great Falls Education Assoc.

Taking it to the halls

MEA-MFT Secretary-Treasurer Rich Aarstad and others organized state employees to line the legislative halls during their lunch break day after day, week after week, politely asking legislators to move on HB 13, the state pay plan. Aarstad's local, the Federation of Historical Society Workers, led the charge. Clockwise from top left: 1) Caitie Patterson, Kathryn Kramer, and Loreto Pinochet, Historical Society; 2) Eric Feaver; 3) Jeff Malcomson, Historical Society; 4) State employee members of MEA-MFT, AFSCME, and MPEA; 5) One of the younger HB 13 fans.



Resources from the Montana Professional Teaching Foundation

MEA-MFT's Montana Professional Teaching Foundation offers you the following opportunities and resources:

Karen Cox Memorial Grants:

The Montana Professional Teaching Foundation created the Karen Cox Memorial Grants to help educators who raid their own bank accounts



Florence Carlton Elementary School students display masks they made at a workshop funded with Karen Cox Grant funds. Music specialist Lauree Sayler applied for and received the grant to help fund the three-day school-wide workshop.

to buy supplies and enrichment projects for their students. The grants are named in honor of Karen Cox, an outstanding Billings teacher who lost her life working to improve public education.

The maximum grant is \$500, a modest amount that can go a long way. Grant recipients have used their grants for everything from books to science equipment, workshops to supplies.

To download a grant application form, visit mea-mft.org/our_foundation/programs/karen_cox_memorial_grants.aspx. Or contact Cathy Warner Novak: cwarner@mea-mft.org.

Jim McGarvey Scholarship

The late Jim McGarvey, former MEA-MFT vice president and former chair and vice chair of the Montana Professional Teaching Foundation, was instrumental in helping create MPTF.

In his memory, an anonymous donor has given \$5,000 to MPTF to help create a union scholar-

ship program in his name.

McGarvey deeply understood the relationship between unions and excellent teaching. He knew that top-quality education could only be achieved if teachers have a voice in shaping education curriculum and policies.

He also knew the teaching profession could only attract high-caliber teachers if they have the right to band together for livable salaries, benefits, and dignity in the workplace.

The **Jim McGarvey Scholarship for Union Leadership in Public Education and Service** will help fund MEA-MFT member participation in professional development opportunities that enhance quality public education, public service, and union involvement and leadership therein.

Existing relevant opportunities include: MEA-MFT Educators' Conference Scholarships, MEA-MFT Women's Leadership Training, Montana Human Rights Network Policy Institute Seminars, AFL-CIO Rocky Mountain Labor School, National Labor College, and other applicable events.

Applications for the scholarship will be solicited as opportunities arise. Applicants must be MEA-MFT members.

To learn more, contact Cathy Warner Novak at MPTF: cwarner@mea-mft.org

Save for college and support MPTF

May 29 (5/29) is national College Savings Day, and groups all over the nation strive to raise awareness of 529 college savings plans.

What better way to celebrate than to save toward a college education for yourself or a loved one; and help the Montana Professional Teaching Foundation at the same time?

MPTF recently partnered with College Savings Bank, the program manager for the Montana Family Education Savings Program.

When MEA-MFT members sign up for the college savings program through the College Savings web site, MPTF will receive a royalty for each deposit made. These royalties will fund MPTF's efforts to promote excellence in teaching and learning in Montana.

(Continued on p. 17)

Opportunities & resources for educators

NEA Foundation grants

Need a grant? Many MEA-MFT members have received grants from the NEA Foundation's grants to help educators boost student achievement. You could become the next grantee.

Student Achievement Grants are aimed at improving achievement of public k-12 and higher education students in any subject area.

Learning & Leadership Grants support public school teachers, support professionals, and higher education faculty.

DonorsChoose.org: The NEA Foundation has teamed up with DonorsChoose.org to match public donations to support NEA member requests for classroom materials.

Learn more: www.neafoundation.org/ ■



Works4Me, Share My Lesson

Looking for creative ideas for your classroom? How about *hundreds* of ideas? No matter what grade or subject you teach, you'll find amazing ideas from your peers across the nation via MEA-MFT's national affiliates, NEA and AFT.

They offer lesson plans, handouts, quizzes, videos, suggestions for parents, and much more. Check them out:

- NEA's Works4Me: www.nea.org/tools/Works4Me.html. From there you can also subscribe to Works4Me and get weekly tips via e-mail.
- AFT's Share My Lesson: www.sharemylesson.com ■

Works4Me

nea.org/tools/Works4Me.html


sharemylesson

www.sharemylesson.com

Save for college and support MPTF

(from p. 16)

All College Savings Bank plans feature FDIC insurance up to \$250,000 per account held in the same capacity, making College Savings Bank the safe, affordable, and easy way to meet your needs. You also receive the favorable tax benefits of having a 529 savings plan. All earnings grow tax-free, and distributions to pay qualified education expenses are also tax-free.

It's never too late to save for college. Find out more about these products at www.collegesavings.com/MPTF. Or call a client service representative at 800.888.2723 to get started. Be sure to identify yourself as a member of MEA-MFT. ■



Mark your calendar!

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Our Lucky 13 in the '13 Legislature: our members

Fourteen MEA-MFT members served in the 2013 Montana Legislature. Thirteen of them deserve special recognition as outstanding friends of public education, public services, and public employees.

All of these member-legislators work long, intense hours for the people they represent, both during the legislative session and be-

tween sessions. Some of these members are legislative veterans; others were freshmen this session.

One freshman legislator, Amanda Curtis of Butte, posted a daily YouTube video during the session, describing her experiences. On her last video, she said this:

“I’ve learned that Montana truly does have a citizen legislature. Anyone can be involved.

I’ve also learned that people across Montana really are interested in having a voice. They are paying attention. *You* are paying attention.

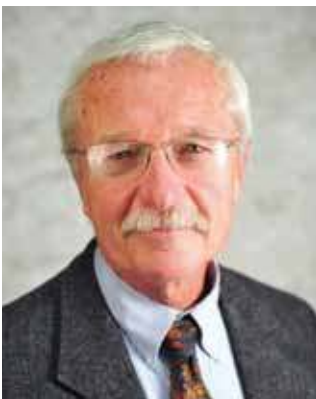
“You can be involved. We should be doing it, so we are at the table when decisions are being made that affect us. Because if we don’t make the decisions, someone else will make them for us.”

Our thanks to all of these

members for doing double-duty Work That Matters for Montana’s people!



Representative Edie McClafferty, Butte. Fifth grade teacher. Third term. Passionate supporter of Head Start; carried our Head Start bill this session and last.



Senator Dick Barrett, Missoula. Retired economics professor, U of M. Two terms in the House. First session in the Senate. Strong voice for fair taxation.



Representative Franke Wilmer, Bozeman. Political science and international studies professor, MSU Bozeman. Third term. Fought eloquently for pensions, voting rights and against school privatization.



Representative Casey Schreiner, Great Falls. Middle school science teacher. First term. Worked especially hard on the state pay plan, voting rights, and student truancy.



Representative Bob Mehlhoff, Great Falls. Retired math, chemistry, business teacher. Third term in the House. Especially helpful this session on pensions.



Representative Jean Price, Great Falls. Retired art teacher. Second term in the House. Served on House Education Committee: a real test of patience and perseverance.



Representative Doug Coffin, Missoula. Molecular genetics professor, U of M. First term. Forceful advocate for higher education.

All of these folks are outstanding friends of public education, public services, & public employees. See more member legislators on page 20.

Our amazing members in the 2013 Montana Legislature

(Continued from p. 19)



Representative Frosty Calf Boss
Ribs, Heart Butte. Elementary
teacher. Second term in the
House. Especially strong on
voting rights for all Montanans.



Senator Tom Facey, Missoula.
High school science teacher.
Four terms in the House.
Second session in the Senate.
One of our main go-to folks
in the Senate, particularly on
public employee pensions.



Representative Amanda Curtis,
Butte. High school math teach-
er. First term. Carried MEA-MFT's
bill to use lottery revenues for
higher education.



Representative Tom Woods,
Bozeman. Molecular biology
and physics professor, MSU
Bozeman. First term. Heroic
sponsor of the bill to save the
Teachers Retirement System.



Senator Robyn Driscoll, Billings.
Education support professional.
Four terms in the House. First
term in the Senate. Spoke
forcefully against privatizing
Montana Developmental Center.



Representative Mary McNally,
Billings. Business professor, MSU
Billings. Second term. Eloquent
spokesperson on the House floor.

**More member
legislators on p. 19**

MEA-MFT is social. Join the conversation.

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President Eric Feaver on
Twitter: @efeaver

Web site: www.mea-mft.org

